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Perseverance in the War, the Interest and Duty of the Nation.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST PARISH,

L E X I N G T O N ,

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1864.

BY

L. J. LIVERMORE,

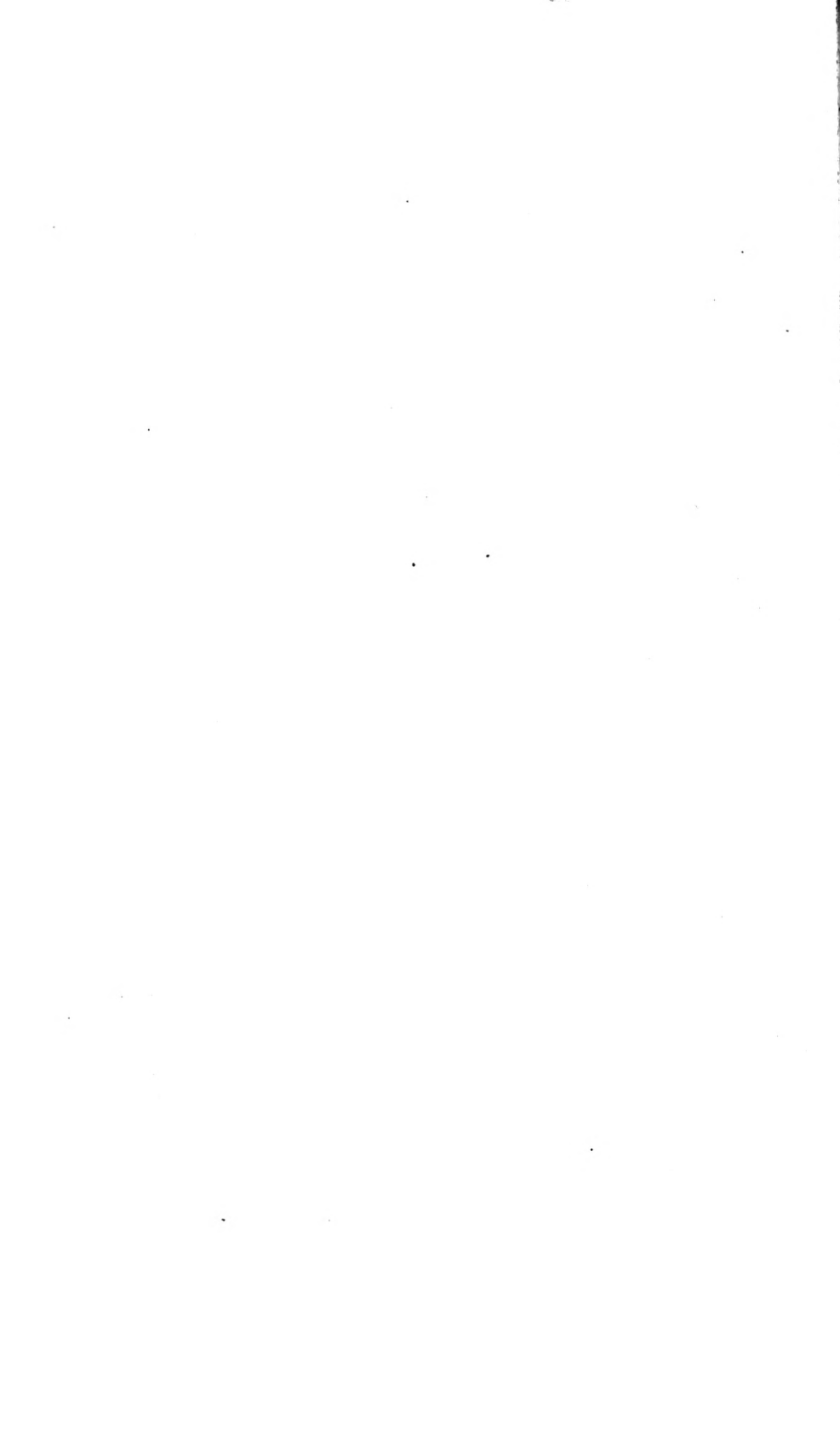
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

published by Request of the Congregation.

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GALATIANS vi. 9.

LET US NOT BE WEARY IN WELL-DOING ; FOR IN DUE SEASON WE SHALL REAP,
IF WE FAINT NOT.

WE accept these words without hesitation as an abstract moral axiom. The praise of perseverance has descended to common-place, both as to worldly and higher concerns. If I were to urge it as a duty in your religious life, no one would question the soundness of the doctrine. But just now, Providence has taken it out of the abstract, and put it before us in the shape of a momentous practical question. To-day, the question is as plainly put to us, as if it were written in the firmament in letters of fire : ‘ Will you persevere, and so reap the reward of all you have done ; or will you faint, and stop short and lose not only the results of what is yet to be done, but of all the immense expenditures already made ! ’ Nothing else half so much as this tests our religion to-day, whether we are old men, or young men, mothers of soldiers, or wives, tax-payers, or voluntary contributors to the great cause. There it stands on the sacred page, as if it had been written for just this emergency : ‘ Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.’

The words imply that it may happen, even in the plainest path of duty, that we find discouragement; that success is long deferred; that sufferings and sacrifices abound; and thus there comes temptation to faint and be weary. We are in this fiery trial now. The long, terrible path of war stretches wearily behind us, and we cannot yet see clear and certain change in the distance that stretches before us; but more of these terrible slaughters, of these exhausting expenditures, of these financial disturbances which add to the toils and privations of the poor, and make many a strong man stagger. It is no reproach to us that we feel weary, and are strongly tempted to desist, to fly from this present crowd of evils, though it be to others that we know may be worse. I do not think highly of the wisdom or the goodness of the man who speaks flippantly and indifferently of the continuance of the war. He either has no mind to understand, or no heart to feel, the most awful woes and calamities of his fellow-men. I do not despise or severely condemn those who from a genuine feeling of the horrors of this contest, are tempted to ask for its termination at any cost. I confess to feelings so sad, to sinkings of heart so hard to overcome, as to effectually bar me from looking down with self-complacent condemnation on any, because they cry out in sincere sorrow for the end of carnage.

But because I have these feelings, and only by earnest and conscientious reflection, overcome them, in the plain, irresistible conviction that they are a sinful temptation, contrary to the teachings of reason, to the requirements of righteousness, and the will of God, I feel the more confident in urging the duty and necessity of persevering. Adopting the classification of the soldier who spoke in Faneuil Hall the other night, I say

that with those who cry out for peace, because they are at heart friends of the traitors, and who are ready to put arms into the hands of their partisans here to inaugurate civil war in the now peaceful north, I have no shadow of sympathy. A class more worthy of the detestation of all good people I do not know in the wide world. They are baser than the rebels themselves, as much as disguised and renegade traitors are worse than open foes. With those who are chiefly moved to their outcry for peace by the dread of pecuniary loss, I have not much sympathy. I never learned to admire Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; and there is certainly no more reason to admire those who would chaffer with malignant traitors in arms, and take the steps which go straight to the destruction of our glorious heritage, and the shameful extinction of our national unity, to save their dividends or escape their share of the cost of saving the nation. There is no shadow of justification for deciding this supreme question of peace and war, only or chiefly on grounds of financial interest, until we have gone as far to perpetuate our institutions, as our fathers did to plant the first seeds in this wilderness, and later, to assert their freedom and independence. If we should spend every cent of the accumulated property of the whole nation, and come back to our primitive condition, our minds and muscles and broad territory with which and on which to rear a new fabric of civilization, we should do no more than the cause of our country is worth. There can be nothing but eternal dishonor, and the just judgment of God, awaiting us, if the love of money or the fear of its loss controls our settlement of such questions as those involved in this war.

In the third class, the timid, there are some who are simply personally timid; we will say nothing of them.

There are a far greater number, who for various reasons, feel discouraged, and are inclined to stop, because they see no use in going on. For all such, a few considerations of encouragement and reasons for perseverance are appropriate.

First, then ; in any great work, undertaken for good reason, reasons of moral obligation, of religious duty, we have no right to stop. Whether we succeed or not is God's concern. Ours is to do our duty. In this lengthened struggle, if we began it for good and sufficient reasons, we are sharing the common experience of mankind in almost every great and good thing that has ever been accomplished either by individuals or by nations. I am not going to argue the question whether when we were so causelessly and wickedly assailed by a vast conspiracy, it was right for our nation to assert its authority and right of self-preservation. That question is settled. A million brave men have affirmed the right answer at the cost of life or its free venture ; and for a time at least, hardly a man was so blind, so base or so foolhardy as to say nay. Is the right of the thing changed any since three years ago ? Is the question at issue at all changed ? I know that collateral questions have entered, if we dare to call such questions as those pertaining to slavery, collateral ; but the unqualified declaration of the arch rebel lately showed that there is in fact just one question at issue ; the maintenance, or the destruction, of our nationality. Nor is there any change in the temper of our foes, the spirit of more than infernal pride and ferocity with which from the first they have avowed their purpose. After all the bitter lessons they have had, they still talk of trampling us in the dust, plundering our cities, devastating our fields, wringing from us by the hard hand of military violence the full satisfaction of all their greed and revenge, and

giving us peace, when we crawl in the dust at their feet, as cowed and submissive as their own wretched bondmen. Made mad by their cherished crime, that which prompted them to treason and revolution, which has nursed to frightful proportions every proud and cruel passion, their whole course is that of men beyond all reach of moral restraint and sense of decency. There would be as much hope in trying to negotiate with a pack of famished and enraged wolves, eager to suck the blood of women and children, as with these leaders, or rather, these ruthless tyrants of the southern people. There is no path open for negotiation with them. They themselves shut it in our faces, or rather in the faces of those who talk of it, with frenzied and extravagant insults. There is just one thing for us to do ; and it is to go on till they are utterly overthrown. It is what God gives us to do ; what I firmly believe we shall do.

This alone is not a depressing view ; a great nation, consecrating itself, life and treasure, hands, minds and hearts, to a sublime task like this, even if so far we saw no light, no actual progress towards the end ; under a just and overruling Providence, there could not but be hope in this. But we do see progress ; and I wish next to show what there is to encourage and make us feel that the joyful time of reaping is not in the remote future, even if it is not close at hand ; that the fields are beginning already to grow white for the harvest of peace. There is no need, as there would be not time, to enter into particulars. We shall get a sufficiently plain and suggestive view of the course of events by passing in brief review the leading elements of the military position in the successive campaigns of the war.

In 1861, after the first great reverse at Manassas, the summer passed in the formation and discipline of our great army around Washington. With some exceptions,

the line between the military forces of the nation and the rebels, was that between the free and slave States, Delaware and Maryland being the chief exceptions, the Potomac there forming a natural line in our favor. Missouri alone, which geographically belonged with the free States, was, as the field of strife, about equally occupied by the opposing forces. The Mississippi from the mouth of the Ohio to the Gulf was in the possession of the enemy. They held the south bank of the Ohio for a considerable distance, and fortified positions of great strength in Kentucky. Not a position of commanding importance on the coast was ours, south of Fortress Monroe. And all this the rebels claimed and fully expected to hold as their own.

In 1862, we had gained possession of the great inland waters of North Carolina, thus permanently securing the greater part of the coast of that State; of Port Royal, South Carolina, giving us control of nearly all the coast of that State, and its gems of the sea, the cotton islands; of the forts erected by the enemy near the mouth of the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, opening the way to the gulf States, and giving us substantially the military possession of Kentucky and a large part of Tennessee. We had also driven all large bodies of the enemy from Missouri. After the terrible battle at Pittsburg Landing, and the abandonment of Columbus and Island No. 10, the line of the war moved, not to return except for a brief time, to the southern part of Tennessee. We had recaptured Fort Pulaski, so getting control of the chief port of the great State of Georgia, and we had taken New Orleans. Were not these great and important gains? And to balance them, we had not lost any territory or important position.

But during this year, the main army, on whose operations most seemed to depend, was not successful. I

need only name the campaign on the Peninsula, the retreat, its second disastrous series of battles at and about Manassas, the invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania, and the battle of Antietam, where the remnants of a brave but unfortunate army, reinforced with troops hastily forwarded from the North, by indomitable resolution defeated and drove back the invaders, disappointed of their chief prey, leaving us in this part of the great field substantially as we were at the beginning. Thus the year drew to a close. We had the Mississippi as far as Memphis, and New Orleans was in our hands; but the strong posts of Port Hudson and Vicksburg effectually closed the river for two hundred miles. The southerners, secure behind the strong mountain line of central Tennessee, ruled with an iron hand the loyal people of the valley, and talked of retreating, when it came to the worst, and making a final, concentrated stand at Chattanooga.

In 1863, we have the capture of Port Hudson and Vicksburg, and the opening of the Mississippi, which in themselves were enough to make it a prosperous campaign, had we simply held our own elsewhere. But in this year, we have also the heroic march of Burnside's men over the mountains of Tennessee, and the deliverance of Knoxville, and with it, of East Tennessee, and the seizure of the most direct railroad line from Virginia to the South-western States. At the same time, with parallel movement, Rosecrans marched to Chattanooga, and took possession of it. The battle of Lookout Mountain soon after, secured our line of communications; and fixed us securely in that important position, while the enemy were forced back into Georgia. We also gained military possession of the greater part of Arkansas. So the great line

moved on, reducing the territory of the rebels to a narrow strip on the Gulf and the Atlantic.

While these prosperous events were occurring elsewhere, the army of the Potomac was passing through another campaign hardly less trying and disastrous than that of the year before. The severe reverse at Fredericksburg occurred before the close of 1862. Early in 1863, took place the still bloodier repulse at Chancellorsville. Then came the second rebel invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania, more formidable than that of the year before, but ending at Gettysburg in a bloodier battle and a more decided defeat than that of Antietam, with nearly the same result. The enemy retired, weakened and humiliated, and baulked again of the plunder and triumph which they had arrogantly boasted they were sure to obtain. And so we come to the beginning of the present year.

Has there been anything in the present campaign reversing the steady progress of the three preceding years? Have the rebels regained possession of any important place, or carried the line backward? Two vital points have concentrated the energies of the two parties. Of these, one is in our full possession, after a long and brilliant succession of operations, in which our commander has used all his resources in assailing, and the rebels all theirs in defending the place, which now puts in our hands the second great line of railroad connection between the remote parts of the Confederacy, leaving them only a roundabout and indirect route, and gives us a position of great natural and artificial strength near the centre of the wealthiest and strongest of the rebellious States. If we have not yet gained Richmond, it is at least true that we have never before been in any better position than now with reference to that place. We have also practically possession

of the harbor of Mobile, the last but one of the important seaports held by the rebels east of the Mississippi. We have already this year made a long march towards the possession of every strong position, every important seaport of the rebellion.

This is the second ground of encouragement, and reason for perseverance : that we have made steady and constant progress towards the righteous and triumphant termination of the war. We have suffered defeats, many of them disastrous ; but as a whole, the course of the war has been one of steady progress towards a complete triumph.

But the question may now meet us : Are we not well nigh exhausted by what has already been done, exhausted of men and of money. It does not require us to trifle with the immense sacrifices already made in both, to answer, No ; we are not exhausted, or coming near to being so. Our population is not drained of its men of the proper age, health and strength to do military duty. I do not feel inclined to consider now how valid the reasons are which induce so many to meet the call of duty by paying money for substitutes. Each may justly settle such questions for himself. But of the fact there can be no question, that our country is yet full of men able to do military duty. We have not robbed either the ' cradle or the grave,' to use Grant's expressive phrase. We have not been obliged to stretch the limits of the military age either up or down, beyond what experience has shown to be suitable. There is no apparent danger that we shall be obliged to do so. The drain on our life and strength has been very great, too great for any cause less sacred and momentous ; but it cannot by any figure of speech be properly described as reaching or very nearly approaching, the point of exhaustion. It is probable that more than half of all the immense host who have

entered the service since the war began are now for one or another reason, back again in civil occupations, and able, if the call should be imperative, to take up their arms again. Most of them, I believe, would do it, rather than see the cause fail, and more readily but for the natural feeling that others who have not yet rendered any personal service should take their turn first.

Are we then financially exhausted? I am no more disposed to speak lightly of the pecuniary cost of the war, than of its expense in life and health. But immense as our expenditure is, it is less than statistics show to be the surplus earnings of the people. Understand this. The thousand millions, (it is in fact much less than this,) which the war costs us annually, is much less than the industry of the nation creates, each year, over and above the cost of our living. We may look at it in another view. Suppose the war debt at the end of the present year to be two thousand millions, it will be very nearly ten per cent of the property valuation of the nation. Is a man financially exhausted, who being rich, and in full possession of his faculties, owes a debt amounting to one-tenth of his estate? In fact, the question of financial exhaustion cannot come before us. A government like ours, has no power to exhaust the finances of the nation. It may exhaust its own credit, may reach the limit of its power to get possession by tax or otherwise of the nation's property.

This whole pretence is exposed when we consider that if the nation would loan to its Government only that part of its property which is represented by the national paper money, leaving farms and workshops, factories and railroads, and every form and kind of real property untouched, it would relieve the Government of all its embarrassments, and turn the whole financial

current back from inflated prices, and a depreciated currency to, or nearly to, a specie basis ; and in doing this, would reduce the cost of the war to less than half of its present nominal amount.

Our national expenses are, as has been said, less than the surplus earnings of the people, so that we are not growing poorer, but only not growing rich so fast, as before the war. It is also the fact that our capacity to pay a debt is increasing in an immense ratio. Every new farm settled in the wilderness, and more are settled now than ever before, every new mine opened, every new road built, every family of immigrants, and they are coming faster and of a better quality than almost ever before, is an addition to the debt-paying power of the nation. I think it is not an extravagant estimate, that if the war were to close now, each man's share of the debt would be hardly half what it would have been, if the same amount of debt had been laid on us four years since. The immediate difficulties of the national finances are not small ; but there are grounds of hope for relief not very distant ; the check on profuse and needless imports ; the impulse given to exportation ; and above all, the solid and substantial reasons, found in facts testified to by our most competent and judicious commanders, for expecting soon a contraction of our military operations, as the armies of the rebels waste by the inevitable losses of war, for which, having already "robbed the cradle and the grave," they have no compensation in farther conscriptions.

I feel how imperfectly I have presented the reasons for encouragement and perseverance in this great struggle for freedom and national life. Bad as the war is, a wretched, dishonorable peace would be worse. It would, I truly believe, be a sin against God, and a

crime against man to hold any parley with these enemies of all that is good, except on the terms constantly held out to them, by our Government; submission to the authority of the nation, and the reference of all disputed points to the proper legal tribunals, *after* peace is re-established. Vengeance on them for their crimes from human hands I do not desire. Their crime is too great for the punishments which we think just for common murderers. Let that be left to God, to their own consciences, when the terrible day of awakening comes, and to the abhorrence of all future generations. I would not have now, never have wished to have, any element of vindictiveness in our treatment of them. So far as their own crime has opened the way to righting the wrongs of their slaves, let it be held as being God's providential help to the wronged and suffering. We cannot enslave, nor suffer to be re-enslaved by their former masters, those once actually freed. What the full extent of the work of the war must be in this respect, I am not prepared to say. It will be time to settle this question, when it alone stands in the way of peace. At least, we can all rejoice in the belief, that this great crime and fountain of crimes, cannot long survive the convulsion which it invoked for the sake of its own expansion and perpetuity.

In saying so much of the war, and of the duty of the nation, I claim to be no partisan. The great majority of the people of all parties are resolved to maintain the wholeness of our country. Questions of the best men and measures to make sure of this end, belong to other times and places. It is right for me, however, here, to invoke a spirit of candor and mutual justice, in the civil struggle that is coming. No good cause is strengthened by railing, false accusations, mis-

representation and duplicity. Let the issues be frankly, fairly and distinctly stated and argued; and let the people decide, not by the stormy fury of passion, but by the calm guidance of reason. So will the voice of the people be the voice of God.

It remains for me only to add a word as to the immediate appeal made to you to-day, in behalf of our sick and wounded soldiers. The general question of the duty of ministering to their comfort has long been settled. What was right two or three years ago, is right now. Can any class plead for exemption from this call? Those who are exempt by law from doing military duty, surely owe it to those who give life and health for the country, to secure to them when sick or suffering from wounds, all that will contribute to their comfort. Those who are liable by law to serve in the army, but who so far have escaped, or have induced others to serve for them, cannot lie down to sleep with a good conscience, knowing that those who are fighting for them, are left to endure greater sufferings than they need, for want of what we at home could send to them. Mothers, sisters, wives, you would not withhold your help from your own loved ones, if they were in the service and sick. Will you fold your hands in indifference, because the sufferers are the children, brothers, husbands of others? Nay! They are all *our* sons, brothers, fathers, suffering for our country, for our free institutions, for our future peace, prosperity, strength and honor. They are entitled to our love, gratitude and liberal service.

As members of this old and honored parish, honored in the memory of that other great conflict for liberty and human rights, it rests on you to maintain its character, its honor, now; to enable those who are

associated in its name, to go on in their sacred work of charity and mercy, as well as patriotism. It is yours to sustain and encourage them by such gifts as the time and the cause call for. Your gifts hitherto have been held sacred to the last cent, and used to send the utmost practicable amount of useful articles to our hospitals. Your gifts now and hereafter will be used in the same way, and may the blessing of Almighty God go with them, and remain with you.



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